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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS ATHENS 000164

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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: EXTREMISTS CLASH IN ATHENS RIOT

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Competing demonstrations of far-right and leftist groups turned ugly on February 2 when violence broke out between the two groups. Downtown streets were closed, several hundred riot police were mobilized, and several businesses were damaged. The rioting lasted for 10 hours. Several people were injured, and three people required hospitalization. Although up to 100 people were detained, there have been no arrests. Greek commentators are criticizing the police for an insufficient response. End Summary.

Competing Demonstrations Turn into Riots

¶2. (U) On February 2, more than 400 leftist extremists and about 100 members of the far-right group Chrysi Avghi (Golden Dawn) clashed in a riot in central Athens. Chrysi Avghi had announced a demonstration in downtown Athens commemorating the 1996 standoff with Turkey over Imia/Kardak island. Greek leftist/anarchist groups then announced a counter-demonstration at the same time. Although the demonstrations were planned for the afternoon, individuals from both groups arrived earlier than expected, and began to clash at around 11:00 a.m. The violence between the two included rock throwing and assault with bats/pieces of wood. The Greek anti-riot police mobilized (as they had planned to be on location with greater numbers at the later time) and eventually separated the two groups. There were several minor injuries. Two people were sent to the hospital with head injuries after being struck by rocks. Another man required minor surgery after sustaining knife wounds to the abdomen.

¶3. (U) After police used tear gas to separate and disperse the protesters, many of the leftists/anarchists regrouped and joined with members of another planned demonstration against genetically modified foods in front of Athens University in the downtown area. On this occasion, the protesters barricaded the street and hurled rocks at police officers. They were eventually disbanded.

¶4. (U) Greek police announced that they had detained and questioned 100 individuals, but that they have made no arrests. There are varying estimates of damage from the riots. Greek police publicly announced that six banks, one store, and four CCTV cameras had been damaged.

¶5. (U) There was no damage to U.S. facilities and we are aware of no Americans having been affected by the riots. As is routine, Greek police notified RSO of the planned

demonstrations and Embassy personnel were notified via e-mail on Friday to avoid the areas where the demonstrations were planned.

16. (SBU) Comment: Greek commentators have criticized the Greek police for its response -- both for failing to be better prepared for the clash and for failing to arrest any of those responsible. Some question whether the police were lenient or even compliant with Chrysi Avghi-- TV footage now on YouTube shows baton-wielding young right-wingers allegedly interspersed with police. Greek police tend to be cautious in pursuing arrests against individuals associated with public demonstrations, as they have little confidence that the judicial system will effectively prosecute any individuals charged with crimes associated with public protests/political expression. End Comment.
SPECKHARD